

112 Prince St.  
NYC, NY 10012

February 20, 2001

The Honorable Dan Miller, Chairman  
Subcommittee on the Census  
H1-114 O'Neill House Office Building  
Washington D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Miller:

I write to take strong issue with the manner in which your press release of February 14, 2001, distorts the consistent position I held as Director of the Census. I request that this letter be included in the record of the Subcommittee hearing of February 14. I also request the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee should you again believe it proper to use my statements out of context in such a manner as to attribute to me positions I do not hold.

You have relied on an unverified press quotation to make me appear to have taken a position inconsistent with my many other public statements. I did not say what the San Antonio Express News attributed to me. I have not characterized the accuracy of the Census. In response to a direct question on accuracy at the Press Conference of December 28, 2000, I replied that it was not possible to assess the accuracy of the census until the results of the Accuracy and Coverage Evaluation (A.C.E.) are released. This response appeared, I believe, in a New York Times account. Members of your staff, present at the press conference, know the care with which I distinguished between the success of census operations and the accuracy of the apportionment count.

The next quotation though correct is misleadingly used in its implication that it was census accuracy rather than census operations that was my referent. The quotation in which I complimented the participation of the American public has nothing to do with census accuracy, and everything to do with the higher than expected mailback response rate. The statement you cite from the Brookings Press Briefing is, of course, garbled and thus makes little sense. Moreover, I provided no such Table and thus the implication that I have taken a position on each of the four cells is misleading. Finally, as the full transcript will make clear, my reference to a good census at the Brookings event had to do with the magnitude of the undercount, and how differential


that undercount is across demographic groups and/or geographic areas.

Congressman Miller, as you surely know, I tried very hard -- whether under oath or not -- to speak clearly and candidly on census issues. You know, and your staff knows, that I have repeatedly said that the best and only statistically reliable evaluation of the accuracy of census counts is a post-enumeration survey (for Census 2000, the A.C.E.). Data from the A.C.E. were not available to me (and still are not).

Your misleading use of statements I did not make, or statements made but taken out of context, are designed to lead the reader erroneously to believe that I have taken a position on the accuracy of the census and whether adjustment will improve the census. I have taken no such position and will not until there is an opportunity to examine in detail the results of the A.C.E. I stand by my previous statements. A sound statistical procedure that can substantially improve the accuracy of the census should be used. Whether this will prove to be the case with respect to the A.C.E. is a determination I could only make when the data are available.

I respectfully request that you do not misquote me or misrepresent my position in order to score points in a hearing. To my knowledge, I have never represented your views other than carefully and honestly, and I deserve the same respect.

Sincerely,



Kenneth Prewitt  
Former Director,  
U.S. Census Bureau

cc: The Honorable Carolyn Maloney